

**TESTIMONY OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF INLAND FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON INLAND
FISHERIES AND WILDLIFE
NEITHER FOR NOR AGAINST
L.D. 781**

“An Act to Eliminate Permits for Turkey Hunting and to Expand Turkey Hunting”

SPONSORED BY: Senator SAVIELLO of Franklin.

COSPONSORED BY:

Senator CYRWAY of Kennebec,
Senator DAVIS of Piscataquis,
Senator DUTREMBLE of York,
Senator MASON of Androscoggin,
President THIBODEAU of Waldo.

DATE OF HEARING: March 26, 2015

Good afternoon Senator Davis, Representative Shaw and members of the Inland Fisheries and Wildlife Committee. I am Judy Camuso, Wildlife Division Director at the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, speaking on behalf of the Department, neither for nor against **L.D. 781**.

This bill would do several things:

1. Eliminate the turkey permit requirements;
2. Allow the hunting of turkey with either a big game or small game hunting license;
3. Require deer registration stations to also register turkeys; and
4. Provide for electronic or telephonic registration of turkeys.

The Department would like to provide some information for you to consider. This information is related to IFW's management of turkeys in the past few years, the involvement that the public has had in this management and some concerns about the bill as written.

In 2013 the Department convened a Wild Turkey working group, and based on that group's recommendations and the legislature's support we made a number of changes to the Wild Turkey season framework and bag limits. The hunting hours in the spring were expanded from a half day to a full day, the cost of the turkey permit was reduced for non-residents and the \$10 fee for the second spring bird was eliminated. The allowable weapons in the fall were expanded so that any zone open to a fall harvest is now open to both shotgun and archery. The bag limit was also increased. In 2015, for the first time in history, the entire state of Maine will be open for a spring hunt.

The fee for a turkey permit is currently \$20 for both residents and non-residents with a bag limit of two bearded birds in the spring and two birds of either sex in the fall. That permit fee is consistent with other New England States. In addition, a recent survey of hunters completed in collaboration with the Department of Tourism did not identify the permit cost as a factor when hunters considered hunting Wild Turkey. In fact, the recent changes have resulted in an increase in the number of people that hunt turkeys each year.

Annual Wild Turkey Permit Sales Since 2010:

2010 = 13,846

2011 = 12,757

2012 = 13,191

2013 = 14,977

2014 = 16,573 (preliminary)

Turkeys are classified as big game throughout most states in the East. Allowing them to be hunted with either a large game or a small game license and removing the permit requirement would change the way people perceive wild turkey and could impact our ability to manage them. During the last three years, Wild Turkey populations have declined due to disease, severe winter weather conditions, and mediocre production; however as you can see from the above data, the changes that made to increase opportunity have had positive results. The current permit system allows the Department to monitor the number of people trying to hunt turkeys and the number of people who are successful. This is an essential component to our management system.

We are opposed to electronic tagging. In states with electronic tagging, registration compliance drops to approximately 30%. Our current wild turkey management system is based on accurate data from the harvest and this data is an essential component of a responsible wild turkey management program.

The Department currently does not mandate which species a tagging station registers; it is voluntary on the part of the station. Often tagging becomes a mechanism to encourage additional business. Tagging stations provide an important service to the Department.

I would be glad to answer any questions at this time or during the work session.